



SLEEP TIPS FOR NEW MOTHERS

1 Plan for the fact that your sleep pattern is going to change

Babies are not born with a day-night wake-sleep cycle. They develop this over the first 3 months following birth. So whilst a newborn baby may sleep a lot, they will also wake up a lot for feeds and other attention and will do so at all hours. Once the wake-sleep cycle is established they will usually start sleeping for longer periods through the night. Prepare yourself for their first weeks without this and for the effects it will have on your sleep. Discuss this with others and think about how you will cope with a lot less sleep than usual.

2 Make *your* sleep a priority for you and for others around you

Your partner, other children, family, friends and workplace must understand your need to sleep where and when you can. They will need to be flexible and willing to help you.

3 Minimise other responsibilities, especially for the first 3 months

- Learn to say 'no' to requests for your time other than those that are strictly necessary.
- Think about making a sign for your front door saying "Mother and baby asleep" – put this sign out every time your baby has a sleep if you do not want visitors!

4 Sleep when the baby sleeps

- Broken sleep is better than none and naps can help you catch up on some sleep.
- Best sleep time is overnight. Early afternoon (siesta time) is another time of the day when our body naturally wants to go to sleep, helping you get off to sleep.
- Sleep during the day is more difficult. Make sure your bedroom is set up for sleep – blocking out light with heavy drapes helps, as does making it quiet and comfortable. Air conditioning helps on hot days, heating on cold ones. Eye masks and ear plugs are a cheap way to block out light and loud background noise.
- If you get behind on sleep you may be able to manage for a bit but at some stage catch up sleep becomes necessary. Use weekends or other times when you have ready help to get some extra sleep.

5 When the baby is awake organise so that you can do other things whilst staying in range of your baby.

The right equipment can help: a bassinet, cot or baby rocker can be used to have baby near, but safely accommodated.

6 Let a few things go

Do not obsess about house tidiness, elaborate meals or entertaining others. Let others help you. Ask them. You may do the same for them one day!

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7 Do not overreact

- All babies cry. Crying time generally peaks at 6-8 weeks and then decreases. The usual reasons for crying include hunger, wet or dirty nappy, being over tired, the need to socialise, or being too hot or cold. However, sometimes babies cry for no obvious reason at all! Within limits, see if they will settle before going to them.
- Providing they are reasonably close by you will hear your baby cry. Do not worry that you will sleep through when your baby needs attention.
- If you are concerned about how unsettled your baby may be, seek sensible advice. The *Raising Children* website is an excellent starting point
http://raisingchildren.net.au/sleep/babies_sleep.html

8 Demand vs timed feeds

- There are arguments for each. In the first 8 weeks or so demand feeders may find themselves feeding 2 hourly.
- When feeding at night, do so in a quiet, dimly lit environment so that you can go back to sleep more easily when finished. This is not a time for socialisation with baby or with others. Avoid internet, mobile phone and TV at these times. These are alerting activities that can stop you getting back to sleep.

9 Can others help with feeds?

For bottle fed babies, get someone else to feed baby from time to time (eg overnight). For breast fed babies, it may be possible to express milk (breast pump) for someone else to give overnight. This should not be done until a good milk flow has been established.

10 General sleep problems

Do not ignore the possibility of a sleep disorder if you are very sleepy despite having a reasonably long amount of sleep. Sleep apnea is common, including during pregnancy and after delivery.

11 Depression

The symptoms of sleep loss and depression are very similar and can be confused. If you have serious "blues" that go on for more than a couple of weeks, discuss these with your doctor or nurse.

12 Remember, it will get better!

Baby will acquire a day-night wake-sleep cycle over the first 3 months after birth. They then start sleeping for longer periods through the night and so will you.

For information on over 60 different sleep related topics, written by professionals, visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au. The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.



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